NEW FICTION —IN— VARIED FORMS

THE RED REDMAYNES. By Eden Phillpotts. The Macmillan Company.

WHEN a novelist of the experience and attainments of Eden Phillpotts takes it into his head to write a thorough going detective, mystery yarn, of the Scotland Yard, vanishing corpse, pools of blood order, one naturally expects him to do it with a certain difference. Mr. Phillpotts does not disappoint that expectation, for this is a first rate "thriller," a very cleverly constructed puzzle, but it is also a good deal more, though he has limited that "more-ness" strictly and has not attempted to mix incongruous elements. But the story is more than a guessing game, and its people are not at all the usual lay figures, though he has held them skillfully within the conventions. His Scotland Yard inspector, Mark Brendon, from whose standpoint most of the story is told, is a genuine police officer, but he is also a man. He is no Sherlock, no supersleuth, but neither is he a wooden headed idiot. True, Mr. Phillpotts does feel obliged to lug in a superdetective, in the person of one Peter Ganns, an American, and he is the least satisfactory figure in the story, but even he remains quite possible.

The red Redmaynes were four: three brothers and their niece, the daughter of a defunct brother. It might have been called the mystery of the inconvenient uncles, or of the vanishing uncles, for all of them are eliminated in the course of the action. The woman in the case, Jenny Pendean, is the very happily married wife of a young Cornishman when the tale begins. They are living in apparently idyllic bliss near Dartmoor, when the youngest uncle, Captain Robert appears. There had been disagreements about Jenny's marriage, but when Robert meets the beautiful and amiable Michael Pendean there is an immediate reconciliation. Robert was a big man, "with the largest pair of red mustaches Brendon remembered to have observed on any human countenance." Also violent red hair. And he had suffered from shell shock—by the way, what a blessing shell shock has been to the novelist!

Michael and Robert pay an evening visit to a bungalow that Michael is having built, and thereafter Michael is never seen again, but there is a big pool of blood in the house and numerous witnesses swear to having seen the big red Captain riding away on a motor bicycle, with a great bundle tied behind him. And then he, too, vanishes, apparently into thin air. Every one assumes that he has murdered Michael, probably in a fit of temporary insanity. Jenny, disconsolate and heartbroken, goes to live with the next uncle, old Bendigo Redmayne, a retired sailor, with a house on the cliffs near Dartmouth. But the intelligent detective, Brendon, has most unfortunately fallen in love with the beautiful widow. It should be noted that one Giuseppe Doria, an Italian aristocrat in hard luck, is a sort of servant companion to old Bendigo. He also is ineffably handsome, and quite obviously Jenny and he are to fall in love.

Six months later the lost Robert turns up in ghostly fashion, and very soon old Bendigo is also murdered, apparently by the erratic Robert. His body is not found, and Robert once more vanishes. In familiar phrase, the plot thickens. The story then moves to Italy, to go gunning for the eldest uncle, Albert, a retired book worm, with a villa on the shore of Lake Como. And in due time the phantom red Robert appears and Uncle Albert is also murdered. Meanwhile, Jenny has married the attractive Doria with rather unseemly haste. That is enough of the plot to show that it needed a clever untangler of mysteries, such as the wily American Ganns, to solve the puzzle. Perhaps the experienced reader of such tales will guess, with partial accuracy, at the outset; probably Mr. Phillpotts means him to do so, but he may be sure of a real surprise when the full solution is made clear. The machinery of it is worked with entire verisimilitude, involving no impossibilities, though it may be that Mr. Phillpotte is asking a good deal of us to believe in the utter malignity and unwavering fiendishness of his superlative villains. But there have been Borgias in the past, and there is no reason to believe the evil race extinct. Mr. Phillpotts does not believe in attaching a large lettered tag to his characters, labeling this one as hero, that one as villain, and so on. The villainy is well concealed, as, indeed, it must be in real life to succeed at all. The story has no ulterior motive, no moral, no purpose beyond entertainment. And it does entertain.

H. L. PANGBORN.

THE REIGN OF THE EVIL ONE. By C. F. Ramuz. Translation by James Whitall. With introduction by Ernest Boyd. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

THIS is the first appearance in English of any work by M. Ramuz, who is a Swiss-French novelist and poet and the recognized leader of what may be called a new "school" of national fiction. There is, in fact, little that can be called French in him, although French happens to be his language. As to that, Mr. Boyd tells us that he writes "a remarkable French, compounded of archaisms, folk speech and the idiom of his country, which differs markedly in rhythm and phrase from that of France." His style is also said to be sometimes "awkward and lumbering, but powerful." Mr. Whitall's translation is fluent enough, and vigorous in its phrasing.

But it is not as stylist that M. Ramuz matters, and one suspects that the recognition accorded him in Paris is in spite of his style. For the substance, the body of his work is assuredly important enough to atone for roughness or awkwardness of manner. M. Ramuz certainly performs the very remarkable feat of offering modern readers something quite new; his work does not "classify" anywhere, although, as Mr Boyd points out it has a certain family resemblance to the Celtic revivalists, especially to J. M. Synge's "Playboy of the Western World," and the earlier work of Yeats. There remains, however, a suspicion that M. Ramuz is more definitely an individualist than any of the Irish poets; there is little about him to suggest a "school" of any kind, and although his work is saturated with the landscape feeling of his mountain cantons of Vaud and Le Valais, his fantasy is rather of all time, or any time; dateless and placeless. Its closest literary kinship is perhaps with the spirit of the twelfth century (plus a certain modern sophistication) and the early miracle plays. This book is half straightforward narrative and half miracle, but the elements are interwoven with superb skill to make a fully harmonious whole.

The theme is built around the sudden intrusion upon a Swiss village of a wandering shoemaker, who calls himself Branchu, and is, at first, apparently a fairly normal human being. But he is really *"L'Esprit Malin,"* a title somewhat imperfectly rendered as "the Evil One" for, as he himself expiains, he is "neither Christ nor the Devil," but something in between. Presently his subtle influence is felt; at first in smaller ways and finally to utter destruction. The children fall sick, good men and women turn to evil ways, meanness, brutality, and crimes of violence and of trickery become common and a once moderately good and happy village is turned upside down. Gradually the folk suspect Branchu, but he works a miracle in the healing of a paralytic, and one man hails

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